

Immediate Opportunities and Priority Projects

1. Adopt a long-term concept plan for the Potomac Heritage Trail in Northumberland, Westmoreland, King George, Stafford, Lancaster and Richmond counties.
2. Develop the “blueway” (water trail) and a bicycling route from Washington’s Birthplace to Ferry Farm to Mount Vernon (see map on reverse). With endorsement from relevant local governments and others, apply to the U.S. Department of Interior for designation of the water trail alignment along the Potomac between Wakefield and Mount Vernon.
3. As part of the 2007 commemoration of Captain John Smith’s voyage, develop the following water trail segments as demonstration projects: Aquia Creek—Government Island Blueway (Stafford); Fredericksburg to Lands End Water Trail (King George); Monroe Bay Blueway, incorporating James Monroe Birthplace (Westmoreland); Hughlett’s Point to Dameron Marsh Kayak Trail (Northumberland); and Cat Point Creek (Richmond).
4. Designate and post signs along the bicycling route by summer 2007.
5. Plan and construct bicycling connections among Wakefield, Westmoreland State Park and Stratford Hall using Route 3 as a demonstration project.
6. Fund the development of a parking lot, trails, and interpretive signs at Monroe’s Birthplace in Westmoreland County.
7. Secure funding to complete bicycle facilities, according to AASHTO guidelines, on Route 3 between State Route 214 (Stratford Hall Road) and Ferry Farm and along S.R. 206 between Route #607 and Caledon Natural Area.
8. Explore scenic alternatives for development of a multi-use trail route between Ferry Farm and the Potomac River waterfront attractions in Westmoreland County.
9. Develop a long-term blueways plan for PHT water trail segments that includes recommendations for “landing zones” (areas every several miles that might be incorporated into local and state parkland acquisition plans).
10. Incorporate the long-term concept in local comprehensive plans.
11. Assess the accessibility of former steamboat landings in tributary streams and on the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers.
12. Develop water-to-land access between Stratford Hall Plantation and George Washington’s Birthplace National Monument.
13. Develop a canoe/kayak camping area along the shoreline within Westmoreland State Park.
14. Assess the feasibility and suitability of water-to-land access in the vicinity of Caledon Natural Area.
15. Develop a “Profits from the Trail” marketing program that encourages marinas, bed and breakfasts and campgrounds to participate in the trail project.
16. Provide opportunities for local and regional citizens groups to become involved in the project.
17. Welcome and support the efforts of non-profit organizations to plan events connected to the trail.
18. Submit applications to designate bicycling routes as scenic byways.
19. Work with Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation to ensure that considerations for both land and water access for the PHT are included at Wide-water State Park.

The Next Steps

1. Local governments in the Northern Neck and RADCO planning districts should pass resolutions in support of the concept plan.
2. Local, regional and state agency staff, assisted by others as appropriate, should draft plans to complete priority projects.
3. All primary stakeholders should communicate PHT-related opportunities and securing demonstrations of support for the Plan from businesses, community organizations and others representing both residents and visitors.

Scope of the Full Report and Conceptual Plan

The Northern Virginia Regional Commission was contracted to study and recommend an implementation plan for the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail within the counties served by the Rappahannock Area Development Commission and the Northern Neck Planning District Commission.

The report contains the summary recommendations that have been included in this document, a detailed explanation of the concept plan, a discussion of the merits of the concepts as they pertain to the PHT, immediate implementation and priority projects, background on the National Trails System Act and appendices. The report

recommends priority actions for funding consideration that are compatible with the Trails Act. The list of actions demonstrate the Trail’s potential and will move the project forward, thereby attracting new sources of funding.

While this report focuses primarily on the counties along the Potomac River, the heritage of the Potomac is inextricably bound to the heritage of the Rappahannock River. With this in mind, the counties of Richmond and Lancaster should be offered opportunities to participate in the project as full partners.

A Draft Summary of a Concept Plan

For the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail in Virginia’s Lower Potomac Region

An Opportunity

The lower Potomac River counties of Stafford, King George, Westmoreland and Northumberland have an historic opportunity to re-invigorate and re-imagine the National Trails System through implementation of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail. No where else in the United States is there a comparable concentration of heritage sites and scenic landscapes that embody the birth of democracy and development of the Nation as is found in the Northern Neck, Fredericksburg and Stafford County region of the Potomac River watershed. With a modest commitment of time, energy and resources, and

with the inclusion of Richmond and Lancaster counties in the planning, the Potomac Heritage Trail (PHT) could become the thread from which a vibrant environmentally-based economic development strategy could be woven, tying together such existing historic and natural resources such as Stratford Hall, George Washington’s Birthplace and his boyhood home at Ferry Farm in Stafford County, Westmoreland State Park, Caledon Natural Area, Fredericksburg, Government Island, and amenities such as the Steamboat Era Museum in Irvington.

The Proposed Long-Term Concept

The Potomac Heritage Trail should be developed as a world-class outdoor recreation experience to explore the role of waterways as transportation systems and the significant contribution of the region’s natural resources in the development of the nation’s capital and other regions of the Potomac River.

The interpretive ideas that perhaps best represent this heritage are:

George Washington

George Washington’s life journey spans from Wakefield to Ferry Farm to Mount Vernon to the Forks of the Ohio. Few stories capture the transition from seaboard colonies to a continental nation as effectively and compellingly as Washington’s own. This icon should inform the entire interpretive concept of the PHT corridor.

The Steamboat Era

Within the entire PHT corridor, the 19th century is represented by three transportation stories: The railroads of the Allegheny Mountains; the canal era, represented by the C&O Canal; and the steamboat era represented by the Northern Neck and Stafford County. Together, each region’s distinctive heritage combines for a nationally significant story.

Working Lands and Waters

From Aquia sandstone to menhaden fleets, from timber to shellfish, the bounty of the area has provided sustenance to communities in the Potomac and beyond. The distinctiveness of this region complements other regions of the PHT corridor: the Piedmont as the former breadbasket of America and a place of water-powered industrial innovation; and the Alleghenies as a center for coal, timber and manufacturing.

The trail experiences that represent these heritage values are:

Blueways

In this region of Virginia, water trails—on tributary streams and, where feasible, along the shorelines of the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay—should be recognized as primary segments of the Potomac Heritage Trail. Such “blueways” should be developed for and marketed to people at levels of experience, from family-friendly paddling to challenging open water kayaking. In tributary streams, steamboat landings should be a priority. Trails should be developed as self-contained loops—Aquia Landing to Government Island is one example. Further, developing water trail segments in Rappahannock tributaries in Richmond and Lancaster counties is feasible and desirable. All of these trails should be designated as National Scenic Trail segments.

Bikeways

Bicycling lanes alone do not meet the scenic and recreational criteria of the National Trails System Act. However, the scenic rural roads of this region are a compatible with and complementary to the blueway concept: A specific route for bicycling between northern Stafford County and the Town of Reedville (in Northumberland County), with extensions to Caledon Natural Area and to Irvington, should be designated a “connecting route” to the blueway, the primary route of the Potomac Heritage Trail. Annual and seasonal bicycling events will demonstrate the value of such routes, as well as opportunities to make connections to and among additional resources—all contributing to a world-class experience of place.

Backpacking and Hiking

The forests and farms here have scenic and recreational values that rival those of any National Scenic Trail. While this report does not recommend a specific route, a hiking trail should be included as part of a long-term vision, with coordination among local governments provided by the regional commissions. Private sector interests should also be included in the process: For example, throughout the United States there are numerous instances where timber companies are cooperating to provide rustic, backcountry recreational opportunities in which users are invited to learn the practice of forestry and trails and shelters are maintained by volunteers.

The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail Lower Potomac Concept Plan

Virginia Corridor

